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Oregon Wellness Program – Client Testimonials 2024-2025

“I wanted to express my appreciation for the Oregon Wellness Program offered through the Oregon Board of Nursing. I am saddened to hear that funding for the program was reduced and hope that additional funding can be obtained to ensure access to mental health support at little to no cost for all healthcare workers.

I learned about the Oregon Wellness Program through the OSBN website and requested a referral to a mental health therapist due to workplace burnout and overall fatigue in the rapidly changing healthcare arena. I have worked as an RN for many years, but following the pandemic and wildfire destruction in my community, I struggled to lift my spirits and maintain my desire to continue in the field of nursing. Working with the therapist was life-changing.

Healthcare is both difficult and rewarding; we bring our best to our patients, their families, care providers, teammates, students, and communities. Easy access to mental health support should be a priority in our society.”

- **RN, Gold Hill, OR (Jackson County)**

“OWP has been extremely helpful for me as a physician while transferring jobs and losing insurance. It also led me to meeting one of my favorite providers. The medical field presents people with high stress, traumatic situations, and difficulties in their personal lives due to the nature of their work and having mental health resources to support those who are constantly supporting others is paramount. Nationwide, physicians are beginning to strike due to high levels of burnout. To take care of the nation, we also have to prioritize taking care of health professionals.”

- **MD, Portland, OR (Multnomah County)**

"The Oregon Wellness Program has been a lifeline for me as a nurse, providing essential support and counseling that has helped me navigate the immense challenges of my profession. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I worked tirelessly as a nurse, witnessing the devastating impact of the virus and losing countless patients to the illness. The emotional toll of these experiences was overwhelming, and I found myself struggling to cope with the grief and trauma.

Currently, I serve as a forensic nurse examiner, caring for patients who have experienced sexual assault, domestic violence, strangulation, neglect, and other forms of abuse. This work is incredibly rewarding, but it also exposes me to a constant stream of traumatic events. Without the counseling sessions provided by the Oregon Wellness Program, I would be at risk of long-lasting vicarious trauma, which could severely impact my ability to continue in this vital role.

The counseling sessions have been crucial for my mental health and sustainability in this work. They provide a safe space for me to process my emotions, develop coping strategies, and receive the support I need to continue providing compassionate care to my patients. However, despite having insurance that covers counseling, the costs go towards my deductible first, which can add up quickly and become a financial burden.

The Oregon Wellness Program has been instrumental in bridging this gap, ensuring that I have access to the counseling services I need without the added stress of financial strain. This support has allowed me to maintain my well-being and continue to serve my community with dedication and resilience. The importance of this program cannot be overstated, as it plays a critical role in supporting healthcare professionals like myself who are on the front lines of care and often face significant emotional and psychological challenges."

- **Savannah Powell, MSN, MPH, RN, SANE-A, OR-SANE, Oregon City, OR**

"The OWP Program has been a pillar of my Recovery. I found a Counselor who was able to provide guidance as I re-entered my Practice and provided both professional and personal support as I adjusted to my new life in Recovery. Despite current research and (slowly) changing social attitudes, Recovery in the medical profession remains fraught with stigma and access to confidential treatment is essential. Additionally, the practice of medicine poses unique challenges to the Recovering person and having knowledgeable practitioners is vital for success. We cannot afford to abandon our caregivers in times of crisis and the OWP is a solid investment in our caregivers to ensure that our patients maintain access to the care they deserve."

- **MD, Portland Metro Area (Washington County)**

"OWP made a huge difference in my mental, emotional and overall wellbeing.

In today's challenging and stressful healthcare environment, it's a top priority and necessity for me to have access to therapy.

This has allowed me to show up to work as a healthier version of myself. It has improved my performance at work allowing to take better care of my patients, improving the quality of patient care and my interactions with the rest of the staff.

What was most appealing about OWP were the 8 yearly sessions and the confidentiality."

- **MD, Tigard, OR (Washington County)**

"OWP services has been critical for me to receive counseling for work and life related stress, especially after the pandemic. The services were easily accessible and convenient to schedule without the burden of stigma and negative repercussions related to medical providers seeking mental health support. These services were so important to reduce burnout and has renewed my overall commitment to continuing to provide the best medical care for my patients. The 8 complimentary sessions renewed each year are highly favored over limited sessions as our profession has unique stressors that change throughout our careers. Improved mental health for our health care providers is essential to maintain a health care workforce over the long term and maximize retention of health care providers."

- **MD, Portland, OR (Multnomah County)**

"I have been a client of the Oregon Wellness Program since 2023. I have used my eight visits each year and have self-funded a few on my own. I was not able to afford this program without the assistance of the free access for 8 visits. To be honest, 12 would be best. At least one for each month of the calendar year.

I am a registered nurse with over 30 years' experience working with direct patient care. I am still at the bedside as well as additional roles with new staff onboarding and education. This is a very stressful job. I have angry patients who believe the health care system doesn't know what they are doing. That science and viruses are a hoax to make money. My goal (and job) is to care, heal and help these people when they are so vulnerable in the hospital. I am assigned multiple patients at a time (on a good day 6), often discharging and admitting new inpatients. So perhaps 9 in a regular day. These patients are sick with multiple comorbidities. I have 30 minutes of report in the morning to understand and plan the care of the day. And then I adjust.

Oregon Wellness Program, specifically my counselor Amy Holbrook, has listened to my agony and frustration. Her healthcare specific knowledge enabled her to understand and process with me what my issues are. She has helped with my stress, my care fatigue and my frustration with management that doesn't listen. I am a better functioning person and nurse with her assistance.

I have recommended OWP to coworkers including both nurses and physicians. I also am mentoring some new graduate nurses and have recommended this resource to them.

With all the popular talk about resilience, OWP has actually helped this nurse feel better able to manage her stress and continue working in my field. Please help us professionals working with patients! At least 8 visits per year, but please consider 12. Thank you for considering our needs."

- **RN, Medford, OR (Jackson County)**

"I found out about OWP through a nurse friend about 1.5 years ago. She gave me a referral to her therapist as I was struggling with postpartum anxiety. I had thought about therapy for a while but did not want to commit to paying for sessions, in case I did not like it. OWP was really appealing that I could get my first 8 sessions free each year. Starting therapy has completely changed my relationship with my son and my ability to excel at work. I struggled with a lot of anxiety and guilt having to leave my son to work every day. The anxiety led to intrusive thoughts that left me weeping for days. My therapist helped me work through these emotions and I eventually got on medication. I am in a completely different head space now, and I have a wonderful, secure relationship with my son. This has allowed me to strive for more at work and look forward to the future of my nursing career. If it weren't for OWP services, I'm not sure I would have started therapy and I would likely still be struggling. As nurses, we deal with really emotionally trying situations every single day and this can bleed into our personal lives. If we can't cope in our personal life, we cannot be a great nurse when taking care of patients and other caregivers. I absolutely hope this program continues so that other nurses like me can receive the help that they need and deserve. I fully plan to continue on my healing journey."

- **Kaitly Malone, RN, Newberg, OR (Yamhill County)**

"The OWP services are invaluable and contribute materially to my well-being. Practicing medicine is stressful, difficult and emotionally draining -- especially in the past few years. I have struggled mightily with burn out and thought frequently of leaving the field. The counseling that OWP provides has provided insight and understanding. It has taught me how to handle the stress in a healthy and constructive way -- a distinct contrast to my actions

before counseling. My feelings of frustration and burn out are reduced. I can see a way forward whereby I can continue to contribute to the medical community in which I practice. I cannot say enough positive things about the service and how it has positively impacted my professional life and, in turn, my practice colleagues and patients.”

- **MD, Portland, OR (Multnomah County)**

“This program that has provided me with access to counseling sessions and it is changing my life. I speak in the present tense because I am actively working through several traumatic experiences and stressors that I have experienced over the past several years at work as a night shift RN in Leadership right now. I was actually referred by a peer Nurse while I was being seen in the Emergency Room after a stress reaction of hives and angioedema at work. She suggested I utilize the program and gave me the name of her Counselor. The Counselor that I reached out to got right back to me and explained that I would have three free sessions through OWP. I was determined to get my time's worth and gave her an earful about my experiences with flashbacks, handling trauma on night shift with no support, the lack of resources and moral distress I have experienced as a result, and the administrative harm that has occurred when I raise issues or ask for resources and am told "No." I have previously used the EAP resources through my work and felt like I was talking to someone far removed from healthcare and challenges I was experiencing. Finding a local Counselor familiar with the OWP services has allowed me to process my experiences that have haunted me after 20 years in Nursing. My Counselor actively provides me with feedback and tools to begin to heal. At the conclusion of the three sessions offered to me, I have opted to pay cash out of my pocket for more time with my Counselor as my insurance is not in contract with her. I am fortunate that I can afford this for the time being but I know many Nurses cannot. I do urge you to continue this program and expand it as I know the burnout of Experienced Nurses in our state is an absolutely real crisis.”

- **Amy Pettinger, RN, Marion County**

“I work in the correctional health care setting and this area of healthcare is overlooked. My daily tasks include being with violent and hostile patients, so I carry a lot of stress with me from work. The eight complimentary sessions with a mental health provide who aware of my stress, has helped me to become a better nurse for my patients.”

- **RN, Oregon City, OR (Clackamas County)**

“OWP services have been of great benefit to my mental health and my continuing practice in service to the greater Salem community. Being able to talk to a professional that is familiar with the workload and struggles of a healthcare professional is invaluable. These particular stressors have been around in many forms and the pandemic served to bring them to the attention of the general population. Even though the worst of the pandemic seems to be passed, the unique needs of healthcare professionals continue and will likely continue. Knowing that we have the help of agencies such as OWP is a blessing hard to put into words. I encourage the legislative body of Oregon to continue these vital services so our healthcare professionals can continue working in our communities and receive the assistance needed.”

- **RN, Salem, OR (Marion County)**

“I have been an emergency room nurse for 15 years. Throughout that time, I have experienced hardship, anxiety, depression and uneasiness regarding my job. Daily, I am met with pressures of working fast, efficient, and precise. I

am expected to be kind and patient to those who do not share those qualities. I am expected to be an emotional chameleon during that 12-hour shift. One minute I have to care for an intoxicated individual that is verbally and physically abusive, then care for a sick 3-year-old without skipping a beat, going from a hard, scary or sad situation to being kind and gentle. OWP services has provided me with a healthy outlet to work through the hardships of being an ER nurse, deal with my personal life in a healthier manner, and come to work with a better outlook and understanding. I am a more self-aware person overall, and I know this program has prolonged my longevity as a nurse but has made me a better one. I have gained coping skills, I have improved my communication skills with patients and co-workers, and I have more self-love. I owe the OWP for providing me with free counseling and making my mind healthier so I can care for others.”

- **Sara Klebanowski, RN, Silverton, OR (Marion County)**

“As a newly licensed Registered Nurse and single mother of 3, I know whole heartedly that my mental health directly impacts the patients that I care for each day, and my children that need a healthy mom at home. My mental health has been a struggle most of my life, and I began seeing Heather over 7 years ago. When she switched to private pay, I was no longer able to see her with my state insurance, but she made a promise to me that when I graduated (she knew I would) that I could call her, and she would see me again. Despite every hurdle I have overcome to be the thriving woman I am today; cost continues to be a barrier to receiving therapy. The free sessions offered to healthcare workers allows me to once again see Heather through the Oregon Wellness Program. OWP helps me to be my best self, in turn, allowing me to help my patients be the best versions of themselves.”

- **Carrie Read, RN, Salem, OR (Marion County)**

“I recently heard about the reduction in funding to the Oregon Wellness Plan and wanted to send a response. As a nurse, even the best of work days have the potential for events that affect my mental health. In an industry that exploits the universal need for healthcare and attempts to make it profitable, healthcare workers are increasingly treated as machines with endless productivity potential, any downtime eliminated in the name of fiscal responsibility. Our humanity gets less recognition even as we suffer increased moral injury caring for patients with complex chronic conditions, many of whom we feel we are unable to help in a real and lasting way, given the acute care focus of a hospital environment. Our employers emphasize “resilience,” a form of victim blaming that makes us feel as if we are the cause of our own burnout, as if we could meditate our way out of the state of healthcare in this country. Many of us, understandably, feel further slighted by workplace wellness programs.

Oregon Wellness Plan arrived at a perfect time in my career, when I was so burned out I wondered if I could continue to be a nurse. The services I received, along with a job change, allowed me to recover and be able to again experience the reward that is caring for others. It took me nearly two years to reach that point, and I could not have done so without the help I received and continue to receive. There is no point in time where one “arrives” at good mental health and needs no further assistance. Similarly, healthcare, even with its systemic issues corrected one day, will always be full of emotional work and events that require a listening ear to process. Reducing these funds and, in turn, the access to Oregon Wellness Plan will result in more mental illness and suffering among healthcare workers.”

- **RN, Medford, OR (Jackson County)**

“I discovered the Oregon Wellness Program at a time when I was struggling to cope with burnout and overwhelm. I was working full-time as a public health nurse and had recently started a graduate nursing program to become a Psychiatric Mental-Health Nurse Practitioner. My stress levels were very high and I was having difficulty coping with

the load of working full-time, caring for two children, and continuing my education. The OWP made it much easier to find a professional experienced in supporting healthcare professionals, and it removed the great barrier of cost. Through the OWP, I received mental health support that allowed me to cope better, stay on track in my graduate program, and feel better in my roles of parent and nurse.”

- **Chelsea Campbell, RN, Albany, OR (Linn County)**

“The OWP has undoubtedly made me a better provider. In primary care we deal with an immensely diverse and underserved community. This can feel like a burden but is also very rewarding. Having OWP services has allowed to become not only a better provider but a better coworker to my colleagues. I am able to talk about my work stressors with a 3rd party and come up with solutions or methods to better tolerate these stressors. The program allowed you to not stress about the stigma of seeking mental health services since the first 8 sessions were covered. The OWP providers are highly qualified to discuss the challenges of being a healthcare provider as many of them have also experienced this firsthand. I believe all healthcare professionals in Oregon should have access to OWP for the great benefits it brings.”

- **Julie Preuss, PA, Albany, OR (Linn County)**

“I am honored to write on behalf of the Oregon Wellness Program for physicians.

Due to confidentiality and the professional protections around this, I cannot give details of events in my career. Suffice it to say, every practicing physician has scars. And I am unable to speak freely about them. I have learned, for years, to say I was fine. The culture of medicine, compartmentalization, and being tough are what I relied on to function. I have not been fine. Neither are my coworkers, or my entire L&D unit, who are often devastated by events in the workplace.

Several years ago, I decided I could get help. I called my EAP. I had a list of names that I called and left messages. I got one call back, to learn that therapist had retired two years earlier. I didn’t understand why I had to work so hard to get help when I was struggling to function, all while holding it together to keep going to work. In my ongoing search to get some help, I recall speaking to a random call center operator, while lying on the floor in my kitchen, sobbing. This was weeks after a devastating event. As she tried to console me, I asked, “am I even supposed to be talking to you?” I continued to seek some help, and finally started seeing a private therapist for EMDR, willing to pay as much as necessary out of pocket, so I could continue to perform my job.

A coworker pulled me aside one day, and conspiratorially told me, “Hey. I know what you and the team went through, and I wanted to let you know about this program through the OMB. It really helped me when I was struggling. You should know about it. It’s free. It’s anonymous.” She whispered this to me, as if agreeing that there might be something shameful in asking for, or needing support.

I made that phone call and left a message, with about as much faith as I learned to have from various online resources and EAP dead ends. Within hours, I received a call, from a human being, a fellow doctor, in the late evening on a Saturday night. I was in some disbelief. When I shared my surprise, she told me that doctors may only reach out once for help, and that may be the only moment to catch them, so deep is our training to be invulnerable. I felt understood, and I started sessions with the OWP with minimal paperwork, and immediate access. It meant the world to me to work with a therapist who understood our thought patterns, our endless self-blaming, the rumination of “there must have been something we could have done.” I can report that the deep wound of this event was eventually able to heal. Despite the scar, I have been able to continue my work. The

support of the OWP, reminding me that I was not alone, was invaluable.

Then we had a global pandemic. And healthcare workers went from heroes to people worthy of mistrust. I had another major life event that I cannot describe in detail here. All the while, I kept showing up to work and doing my job. Through the OWP, I found Christina Reeh, who listened to my confusion and pain with extraordinary empathy and validation. She helped me through a personal crisis in a way for which I will always be grateful. When I learned the program funding was cut before completing my sessions with her, I requested she contact me for a testimonial on how much this program has mattered to me, on two separate and unrelated occasions. I truly believe it has allowed me to continue my career to date.

I know I am not alone. In fact, I suspect far more fellow providers have used this program than I will ever be aware, such is our shame in seeking help or showing weakness or vulnerability. It has taken the greater part of my career to overcome this training, and even with intention to do so, I still feel some shame that I could not “do it all.” The training environment of medicine has been broken, and the OWP has allowed me and many other colleagues to find healing, just like our patients. We too need support, listening and empathy. And the investment in supporting us pays dividends of keeping us able to keep going. Please bring back this invaluable healing for the healers.”

- **Hallie Stosur, MD, Ob Hospitalist Lead, Portland Metro, OR (Washington County)**

“On 3 different occasions, I have sought help via the Wellness Program. In each case, the service helped me frame my needs and get real practical help. In each case, the program's professionals who had specific interest and experience helping medical providers helped me continue my practice with renewed hope and confidence and perspective. Were the current reduced service model in place, I would NOT have been able to get help the 2nd and 3rd time I reached out. I urge lawmakers to restore funding to the program that has helped me serve Oregonians for 26 years. Thank you!”

- **Peter Hatcher, MD, Portland, OR (Multnomah County)**

“When I learned that the OWP lost its state funding, I felt obligated to take action. This program connected me with a psychologist and has been singular in improving both my professional and personal wellbeing. My first session was in May 2023, and since that time I have experienced marked improvements in my work performance, sleep health, and marriage. The service is unlike what is available to the general public, as it should be given the delicate but important act of seeking mental healthcare as a physician. I would give my strongest recommendation for the OWP and respectfully request that its funding be reinstated in order to serve other healthcare professionals.”

- **MD, Portland, OR (Multnomah County)**

“There is a lot of talk about physician wellness but this is a program that really delivers. First it is personal and confidential, physicians as many people can have difficulties reaching out at times and “embarrassed” that they may need help. With patient confidentiality, there are also other reasons to not discuss issues with friends or family. It is also very accessible, no barriers to getting care, it was very easy to sign up, find a provider, no financial barriers to getting started. I also like the fact that the providers are experienced working with healthcare workers. The ability to make appointments and meet online also makes it very easy to get care.”

- **Gordon Johnson, MD, Portland, OR (Multnomah County)**

“This program has been very helpful for me. I am a practicing physician. I have been suffering from work-related stress, burnout and anxiety. This has arisen due to work-load and stressors related to dealing with various aspects of work, such as keeping up with timely documentation, stressful patient encounters and long working hours. This

resulted in affecting my well-being outside work as well and I started suffering from some degree of anxiety and depressed mood. Under such circumstances, I learned about OWP and established care with one of the providers. I have been utilizing these services for last two years and found it to be very helpful. I learnt about strategies to manage stress and improve my mood. This resulted in improvement of my work performance as well as my personal life. I really believe the program should be continues for wellbeing of health care professionals in Oregon.”

- **MD, Medford, OR (Jackson County)**

“The Oregon Wellness Program has helped me deal with difficult circumstances that have arose in my life. As an acupuncturist, a big part of my job is listening to my patients and doing my best to help them. I have found that I can do my job much better, if I am able to talk through my challenges with a trusted professional therapist. The therapy sessions I have had under OWP have helped me learn coping tools on how best to deal with challenges. I have tremendously appreciated the healing and help that I have received through OWP. It would be a huge help to me to be able to have the 8 sessions again. Only receiving 3 sessions is helpful, but not enough. Right as you are starting to get to the heart of the problem, the sessions are over. OWP is a wonderful asset to medical providers in the state of Oregon and I would love to see this expand again from 3 sessions to 8 sessions.”

- **Lindsey Dority, Lac, Portland, OR (Multnomah County) and Hood River, OR (Hood River County)**